

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES TO THE PANACEA FOR GREEN ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Any discourse on the phenomenon of the crisis in our environment devoid of its theological perspective is an incomplete adumbration. The unarguable interconnectedness of human and the environment is sustained by divine principles. And so there is need for these principles to be known and applied. In this work effort shall be made to shift radically from pure environmental concern to deeper ecological issues which will define the teleological position of the mission Dei in creation. It shall expose as it were areas of identified crisis in environment and attempts by successive bodies, Protocols and commissions to curb the activities that degrade the environment. But it is the thesis held in this work that since these measures have been constantly flouted by those who put them in place, and that a large percentage of these actions are anthropogenic, which of course is ethical, there is need to support the theological panacea which is laud in this work for a purposeful drive towards the sustainability of our environment. It is recommended that at all levels we encourage environmental education, while remaining thankful to God for the gifts of the earth.

Keywords: Theology, Panacea, Green, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

A work in the area of care for the environment is highly invaluable at a time the prevailing circumstances have made its need very excruciating. This

work shall attempt to clarify the concepts implicit in the study. The environment cannot be given a second order evaluation without exposition on the nature of the environmental crisis. Thus the triune factors in pollution Air, land and water shall be exposed here. Also proposed action plans for remedy shall be discussed. But because these measures are firstly *anthropogenic* and ethically committed, as we envisage, and because upon analysis there is a defect in previous remedies so, this work shall recommend the theological alternative to the challenges of our environment. Hopefully, it is believed that if we all should adhere to these recommendations, the earth shall remain green and the present generation and the future generation shall have a pride of place on the earth.

THE ENVIRONMENT:-

The concept environment has varieties of reference: the social, psychological, and the physical, mainly in this work we shall refer to the physical environment that is all external factors affecting the organism, be it living (biotic) or non living (a biotic). Adewolu, A. O. (2008) views the environment, as the sum of all the elements that influence man or are influenced by man on a regular basis "(95). So here the physical reference to environment has to do with "the earth atmospheres interface which can be divided into physical and human components" (95). The Federal Environmental protection decree of 1988 defines environment as, "Water, air, land and all plants and human beings or animals living here in and interrelationship which exist among these or any of them". A cursory glance at these elements begs for the probing question of not just its origin but also the sustainer of the probing question of the interrelationship which this work intends to attempt.

THEOLOGY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

This is the study of God's relationship to the environment (Jacobus, 2004). This is co-extensive with the concept of Ecotheology which is a form of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationship of religion and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. It focuses on the interrelationship of the ecosystem with each other: identifying factors that degrade nature and sustains the environment. It co-extends with ethics and cosmological drives as fundamentals. Ken, Gnanakan's (1999) definition of Theology of Environment as "the study of the environment and ecological issues with reference to God " (6) places a distinction between environment and ecology? According to him, environmental studies focuses on "how to get involved or even "with what to do". But sequel to the Norwegian scholar Arne Naess' proposition of "Deep Ecology" we can distinguish the concern of Ecology as not just an

attempt to assist people to survive with adaptation tactics to the environment, but beyond this quest to the question of purpose. Thus for Ken, Gnanakan, as also affirmed in this paper, “At the heart of environmental problems are basic ethical issues” (6). He named some as greed, exploitation, self centeredness which only Biblical Theology can help expose and resolve these fundamental problems (6).

THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A booster to a sustainable Theology of the environment is the theoretical view of the phenomenon to which one adopts. The three views are:

- (a) The view that God exist externally to the environment (Timm 1994)
- (b) God exist internally in the environment (Mc Fague 1993)
- (c) God does not exist (Berry 1994)

The first view which is supported by some other cosmological views, (as the theory of the “absentee God”) conceives the creator of the universe as a Being who after creation abandoned the world and hibernated in the skies and therefore external to the environment. This view implies that the environment is created as in the creation stories or other views though the creator does not *inhere* on the created substances. The second view is a divine view that nature and God do not exist as separate deities as Nelson, R.H. (1990) would put it, “the environment is God”. But to put it more succinctly, this verisimilitude to a pantheistic conception was equally at a hind sight captured in the modern rationalist Cosmo-metaphysical philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (God and nature are identical).

The last view has gained many adherents since the emergence of the naturalistic and mechanistic conception of the cosmos, especially by pro-scientific minded scholars through the modern to the contemporary era. Here God is denied as a cognitive entity while viewing the environment as emerging from physical condition and changes in nature. One can appreciate that deep seated neglects at one end and also deep reverence to the environment are coloured by authors, and practitioner’s opinion about the relationship of the Divine Being to the environment that is theologically attributed to his will to be. In essence, what one does to the environment can be determined by his conception of the universe and its relationship to the creator.

ELEMENTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS:

Pollution:

There are basically three dimensions to this factor; the air, land and water. Following the “environmentalists” approach which seeks to show “how to get involved “or” what to do” these shall be treated as effort to sustain the environment and review its being for our exploitation and survival. Pollution refers to the contamination of the earth’s environment with any substance that disturbs human health, the quality of life or the natural functioning of the ecosystem (the living organisms and their physical surrounding). Ojo. M. O. *et al*, (2008) view it as any process or activity that may lead to harmful increase in the quantity of the substance in the environment” (106). It comes in form of solid waste – refuse, liquid – effluents, or Gaseous waste – emission. Others may come in form of ashes, solid fuels, abandoned vehicles, construction demolition sites, etc. recent studies have actually shown that waste can have economic value if properly harnessed through recycling.

Both the upper layer of the atmosphere (stratosphere) and the lower layer (Troposphere) can be polluted through the presence of one or more of these containments: gas, mist, dust, odor smoke or vapour in an amount injurious to life and property. (Rao, 2008: 110). Though Ojo quoting Rao 1991: Owen 2001, is careful to note that some of the substances in the air are there naturally only when it occurs in large concentration that it constitutes pollution. Sources includes the-vulcanizer, burning of tiers, canisters of detonated gases by police or at Christmas and New year eves celebrations, chemical and industrial activities, gas flaring, cement industries among others. During some of these processes these harmful substances are released into the atmosphere. Nitrogen oxides , Sulphur oxides, Carbon Dioxides ,Hydrocarbons ,Smokes etc.

The damaging effects come in the form of poisonous air (Miasma), damage to vegetation (Chlorosis), killing of plants tissues (Necrosis) and eventual dropping of the leaves (Abscission). A comprehensive term for those damaging substances, the photoxicans are a direct produce of air pollution. Acid rain is a process or a condition which through the combination of compounds like sulphur and nitrogen, reacting with oxygen yields sulphur dioxide and other nitrogen oxide compounds in the atmosphere as the vapour condenses it come down on the earth in form of precipitation. It can damage a forest section, resulting in Chlorosis, Necrosis, and Abscission, car, statute, buildings (colour erosion).

The ozone layer placed by nature at the region of the equator or the stratosphere serves a dual function;

- (1) The absorption of heat to keep the temperature of the upper atmosphere from freezing.
- (2) The prevention of the effect of direct solar (UV) radiation from reaching the earth because of its lethal effect on man.

Unfortunately it has been seriously depleted because of mans activities through the release of these harmful gasses. Ozone is a highly reactive gas which is produced at a high altitude by photo-dissouation effect of solar ultra violate radiation. It has a pungent smell and contains three atoms in each gaseous molecule. Oxygen has two O_2 thus ozone is regarded as an allotrope (variety) of oxygen. It is depleted through the dissociation (division of molecule or the breaking up of a molecule into smaller components) of ozone O_3 from oxygen O_2 through the catalytic actions of such chemicals as oxides of nitrogen and chlorine. The most common source is through aircraft exhaust at high altitude, nuclear explosions and agricultural fumigants. The release of these harmful gases has resulted in the phenomenon of Global warming leading to the melting of ice packs and glaciers causing worldwide rise in sea level. We can directly trace the incident of flooding to the effect of Global warning. The phenomenon and menace of flooding is almost a global challenge and it has been seen to increase annually.

The land which can be polluted in various ways as seen by Ojo through the "...buildup of toxic chemical compounds salts, Pathogens or radioactive materials that can effect plants and animals life (114). It has been known to constitute environmental hazards in form of among other things, reduction in the *pouvoir Hydrogen* (Hydrogen power), that is the P.H of the soil and that inhibits the activities of soil micro organism. The consequence is reduction in the binding power of the soil and susceptibility to erosion and poor yields. This is aside from the socio-psychological effect of marring natural beauty and mechanical hazards to the environment.

As a result of both land and air pollution our water is polluted through solid wastes, effluents and emission. These can find their ways through the runoff into streams, or sipping through the pores of the soil profiles into wells and borehole facilities. If untreated can be a source of water borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever and dysentery. In the Niger Delta region, gas flaring, oil spillage and effluents and waste discharges are major causes of environmental hazards. Ologunorisa (2000:250) records that the Nigerian gas has 90% methane, 1.5-2.0% carbon dioxide, 3.9-5.3% of ethane and others. Most of these, especially Carbon dioxide and methane are major components of green-house gases. Pyagbara records that when gases are flared of, they pollute the environment and impact the local ecology and climate as well as people's health (2007:9). Ologunorisa has vividly discussed the health implications of gas flaring in Port Harcourt besides its contribution to global warming (2001: 252-253).

Pollutants from transportation include Carbon Monoxide (CO), Nitrogen Oxide (NO), Hydro Carbon (HC) and Volatile Organic Components. Others are

Particulates, Smog and Lead. These pollutants, according to Akpghomeh (2012:53-55) have local and regional impacts. Others that have global impacts are Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂), Ozone (O₃), Acid Rain, Chlorofluorocarbon (CFCs). These pollutants contribute to air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution and in turn impact the environment. When water is polluted as it is the case in the Niger Delta, it becomes undrinkable and has serious effect on aquatic life. Air pollution affects human respiratory system necessitating health conditions like tuberculosis and asthma. (Udoh, M.A. 2013)

It has been known that several bodies and organizations have reacted to the menace of environment by these activities and have made lofty efforts at curbing these excesses. These plans as good as they are, do lack the moral commitment of parties as they have been reluctant to fully implement them. To some of the agreements we shall now turn:

ACTION PLANS TO CURB THE DEGRADATION OF ENVIRONMENT

Responses to the challenges on our environment have been tackled by nations, groups and different commissions some are discussed here;

- (1) The attempt by the government and organizations to promote a sustainable environment where the environmental functions and asset are left intact (Kelley – Laine 1997: 68) started in the early 1970^s at the world commission for Environment and Development) WCED commonly referred to as Brundland Commission titled our common future (Ken, G. 1999: 139)
- (2) Another action towards a sustainable environment came after the Rio de Janeiro 1992 World Conference on environment known as Earth Summit.
- (3) In Japan 1997 there was another coming together of nations which led to the Kyoto protocol – roll back to pre- 1990 level of Emissions. The list of six main Green house gases to be covered by emission reduction presented. And the rate of emission allowed by nations over a committed period known as party's assigned amount was also given. The US was given 7% between 1990-2008/2012. Eight nations in all, the least being New Zealand, Russian Federation, Ukraine and the highest Ice land + 10 % emission target.
- (4) In 2007 there was also a meeting towards the same aspiration known as the Green Summit. This was held in the city of Reno, April 19th 2007. The Green Summit is an opportunity for residents to participate and help develop plans to reduce emission, improve energy efficiency, recycle, create sustainable building practices, use environmentally friendly products and contribute in other ways to protect our environment.

- (5) The Copenhagen Accord arising from the December 2009 Copenhagen conference recognizes the scientific case for keeping temperature rises below 2°C, but does not contain commitments for reduced emission that would be necessary to achieve the aim (Ologunorisa,56)

THE IMPLICATION FOR ACTION PLANS FROM ABOVE COMMISSIONS:

(1) Parties were to encourage activities for the planting of trees for carbon capture (Green House Gases). carbon capture is a process of absorbing excess carbon dioxides by plants.

(2) Adoption of appropriate energy resources; a change from non-renewable resources to renewable resources that are environmentally friendly and green. Those that fall under the environmentally friendly, also known as the renewable energy resources are, Solar, Wind, Bio-mass, Geo-thermal, Tidal and hydro energy resources. Whereas the non-renewable resources are petroleum, coal etc.

(3) The establishment of Environmental protection Agencies in party nations.

(4) The establishment of waste (Toxic and radioactive substance) treatment plants in industries. These are all laudable measures that have really improved the cause of improving the degraded environment in some nations.

AN EVALUATION CUM THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE:

There was need to outline the facts and figures in the pollution of our environment because man is at the centre of it all (anthropogenic). The pertinent question to be raised is, have all nations complied with these regulations? One of the injunctions was the reduction of the rate of emission of green house gases (hazardous gases). It is reported that the United State of America has defaulted in this regard. Instead "Rich USA offered money to poorer countries to allow them (USA) to maintain their present threatening levels" (Ken, Gnanakan: 146). Incidentally that was the same nation whose president pursued the allegation that the Syrians in September 2013 must have used a chemical weapon known as Sarin Nerve Agent which is twenty times more deadly than cyanide during the conflict with Damascus. The Sarin Nerve Agent attacks the nerve system and respiration choking victim until death. It was alleged the production started in 1980^s. It was also known that the Iraqi's used it to kill the Kurds in the 1985 encounter where about 5,000 lost their lives.

In Nigeria it is a common knowledge that in 1986 an Italian firm dumped a radioactive waste container in a town Koko near Warri where many people died

before it was discovered (Ojo:114).The adoption of the renewable resources is thought of having severe political-economic implication on Nations that do not only own the non-renewable sources as major source of income but also those who are beneficiaries. In those countries the renewable sources may be seen as cheaper than the non-renewable but other factors as economic survival may truncate and ignore the promotion of those that will promote the Green environment.

The list is inexhaustible but at the heart of it is the deep seated Ethical issue which we had earlier identified as greed, exploitation, self centeredness and others. This is the area where religion viz a viz Christian theology becomes important in addressing the current ecological problem. Religion is potent in using its teachings to shape the moral lives of its adherents. Also, religion and in this case Christianity attracts more people from all strata of society than any other institution in society. Further, Lynne White who accused Christianity of promoting the mentality that encouraged the exploitation of nature felt that since the root of ecological crisis was religious, its remedy must also be essentially religious.. For him, more science and technology will not solve the problem except a new religion is found or a rethink of the old one (1967:6)

Over the years, many theologians have seen the need for A Bible based theology that can proffer solution to the problem of the environment. They have since been writing to alert Christian faithful to dangers posed by the exploitative tendencies of human kind. In this list are Birch 1990, McDonagh 1990, Ruether 1992, Haught 1993, and Christiansen Grazer, 1994 (2004;14). In 1992, there was a United Nations conference at Stockholm Sweden where the World Council of Churches Commission of the Churches in International Affairs challenged the church among other things, on the threat posed by environmental crisis on the *Oikumene*. In 1983, "Christian Perspective on Stewardship of the earth's Resources" conference held in Vellore, India. The declaration "Peace with Justice for the whole creation", also emerged in 1989 from the interchurch consultation in Basel. Further, in 1990, world convocation held in Seoul South Korea and a communiqué was promulgated titled 'Justice, Peace and integrity of Creation' (Manus, 2010: 15). It is important to note that stewardship of God's creation and environmental cum ecological conditions are the central concerns of the Biblical message.

The following are suggested action plans by the Eco-congregation of Scotland and K, Gnanakan (1999) as guidelines for theological perspectives that can ameliorate the present ecological crisis

- (1) **STEWARDSHIP:-** Stewardship stems from the scriptural idea that though, the earth is of the lord (Ps. 24:1, Luke. 19:13), He also commanded, "occupy till I come". A steward is one who acts on behalf

of the owner of a property. But this comes with the consequence of also rendering account for stewardship. “ A good steward would exercise dominion or rule, not for self aggrandizement but on behalf of the landlord and for the benefit of all the creatures under his care and with respect for the physical property itself too “

(2) **CO-CREATOR**:- comes from the records of creation in Gen. 1:27, that a man is created in the image of God. It is also co-extensional that is also endowed with the creative attributes of God and is called to continue the act of creation.

(3) **PRIESTHOOD**: - Man as a creature of God was also at various instances made a priest. The priest therefore played a special role as a mediator between God and man. Thus he received the mandate to have oversight over God’s creation. That’s why creation will continue to wallow in frustration waiting for the manifestation of sons of God to liberate them from its bondage to decay (Rom 8:19-21).

(4) **COMPANION/COVENANT**

God and man are partners in the care for the environment. It means both God and man ‘experience the joys of creation and the tensions of living within it”

And on the other hand such relationship becomes defined as a covenant relationship. It operates with an agreement that is binding on each other based on commitment. God offers grace and blessings in return for the obedience on the covenant relationship Lev. 26:4. And when the covenant is broken the reverse becomes the case: sudden terror, wasting disease, fever, poor yields etc. Lev.26:14-17.

(5) **FELLOW-MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF CREATION.**

This model is proposed by Baukham, R. C (2011). It has both Scientific and divine ingredients. It locates man as a vital link in creation. We are masters with authority to exploit and harness the resources in creation and also as participants called to render worship and praise to God (104). Such responsibilities sub-merge man in the hierarchy of being with a call to care and exploit the environment. As the Existentialists would have it, freedom comes with responsibility for an authentic living.

Also Ken, Gnanakan (1999) identifies other theological avenues such as the church acting as the kingdom community where we must rise and shine, propagating environmental projects through care for creation and evangelism, the investment in youth ministries(on

environment) because they will be around the longest, effective observance of the Sabbath rest which is used for recreation, standing up to tell the real truth about environment in the presence of powerful people, interest groups and institutions that benefit from concealing the truths [205-207].

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

A glance at the sources and remedy to environmental crisis in recent times will reveal the deep seated egocentricity of man. The aversion to stick to an attitude provided it has a pragmatic goal has determined much of the anti-environmental actions. All sources of pollution that degrade the environment can be reduced or controlled through the different agreements that have been entered by nations. The problem has often being the political and economic will to abide by the agreements. An instance is the cost of establishing a waste treatment plant or the cost of reducing emission. Ordinarily the economic man would calculate in the words of Jeremy Bentham as shown in the case of Koko town waste dump and many others dumped on the high seas that have endangered aquatic life. But the theological mind which operates from the "categorical imperative" of Kant and which regards the "good" as an end and not a means would think differently (Uduigwomen, A.: 69).

It would consider the sanctity of life, the fact that as stewards we shall give account of the use of earthly resources. Our perception of life and the origin and sustainer of creation would also colour our perception on how we interact with the environment. If we have the conception that we shall be called for account over our dealings with the creations like the ethical theists would have it then our action would have been more humane. As a people who operate under a covenant relationship with God, we need to understand when we have broken the covenant with our creator, why are certain disease incurable like the HIV pandemic and other dreaded ones? Are these not the wasting diseases that the Bible records in Lev.26:16? But unfortunately we live in a time where reference to the Bible is dismissed as unscholarly and irrelevant to the predicaments of the world. Science and Technology and indeed can attempt to answer to most of our challenges but cannot address the deep seated moral issues of man which continue to exist after the application of scientific and technological paradigms.

When nations are fashioning instruments of mass destruction, Chemical and biological weapons, Nuclear armaments, individuals who engage in acid bath attack on their victims, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki inferno, massive pollution of oil producing areas all over the world including the Niger Delta, and the Amazon in South America, Guinea pig test of Nuclear weapons to determine

effects on sentient beings, costly civil wars, genocides, ethnic cleansing conflicts, extra judicial killing by law enforcement agents and others are all indictments against mans stewardship and mission to be co-creators of the earth irrespective of belief system and thought. And so would always leave us with the unanswerable probing moral question, do we ought to do all we can?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Activities to mark the earth's day (April, 22) should be more elaborate to involve both the secular and non-secular organizations. Churches and communities should hold a thanks giving, service to appreciate the gift of the earth.
- (2) Lessons on the environment should be incorporated in sermons, Sunday school lessons. It should also be made available in local languages.
- (3) Government should intensify action to see that when solid refuse are carted away they do not constitute hazards to our drinking water and air. Recycling efforts should be doubled.
- (4) Schools Colleges and Churches should be made to intensify efforts at the formation of Conservative Clubs that would not only plant trees and keep the environment Green but will act through Advocacy on Environment to get the Commissions and bodies who were committed to different agreements and protocols to work and educate the public about the environment.

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